

Sorry, the job has been taken

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Even if Asian school-leavers have high hopes of getting professional jobs, they may nonetheless end up working within their own community.

Glasgow is unusual among major British cities in that a very high proportion of its most recent immigrants are Indian and Pakistani, while there are notably few West Indians. In addition, chronic unemployment has led to a rather different job distribution among immigrants, compared with other parts of Britain. In Glasgow and the Clydeside conurbation far fewer work in engineering and manufacturing generally, against a much higher proportion of sales and service workers, and transport workers. This reflects the fact that many Asian immigrants to Glasgow, like their predecessors from Italy, eastern Europe and Hong Kong, have created employment for themselves by setting up small businesses—usually shops and restaurants. In our study of 54 Asian school-leavers, some 20 of their fathers were self-employed. Another 14 worked in public industries: on the buses, for British Rail and for Glasgow Corporation, particularly in the cleansing department. Only eleven worked in private industry, compared with 33 of the Glaswegian control group. They therefore lack the industrial experience of the typical Glaswegian. From our study it seems likely that their sons will follow this pattern of employment in one aspect at least, that of employment within the immigrant community.

Our sample was 65 Asian boys and a similar group of Glaswegians from the same schools and of similar ages and educational level, of whom we managed to contact 54 and 56 respectively. The figure of 65 represents the total number of Asian boys thought by their teachers to be leaving school in summer 1972. Almost three quarters of them came from the four inner-city secondary schools, in which the proportion of pupils from immigrant homes ranges between 10 per cent and a quarter. ("Immigrant" refers to those born abroad, whose mother tongue is not English.) The rest came from seven other schools of lower "immigrant" densities.

The study was confined to boys as the inclusion of girls would raise additional issues about attitudes to women's employment. They were interviewed twice, once when about to leave school and again one year later. The schools could be classified as "good" corporation schools, with a mixture of working and middle class boys. All these corporation schools are now comprehensive, but at the time of the study, a few were still selective.

More than two thirds of the Asian boys who had jobs in summer 1973 were working for an immigrant employer, mostly in shops and small clothing firms. They had few prospects, apart from setting up on their own. In general, the quality of jobs held by Asians compares unfavourably with those held by Glaswegians. Only two of the Asian boys, compared with 16 of the Glaswegians with jobs were receiving any formal training: one was with post office telecommunications and one on an engineering apprenticeship. Three were employed as trainee cutters in small clothing firms. However, without organised

training it was doubtful if they were any better off than the rest of the Asian boys in shops and restaurants. Moreover, since these are all jobs within the immigrant community, they are insulated from the wider "world of work," which may make it more difficult to get alternative employment later.

Glaswegians were employed as sales workers, but they were much more likely to work for large chain stores and department stores with established career structures and training schemes. Even though these jobs may not be the most exciting, or even well paid, they are a foothold in what Nicholas Bosanquet and P. B. Doeringer call the "primary market"—white collar employment, with real prospects of advancement. Male employees are usually promoted relatively quickly, for instance, with a chance of a minor management post in many cases. A far higher proportion of Glaswegians also had properly organised apprenticeships, with day release and other training schemes.

Work within the immigrant community was not what the Asian boys, or their parents on their behalf, aspired to.

M's case is typical of the feelings of most boys we spoke to about this. He had wanted to be a motor mechanic or television engineer when he left school but, having tried numerous jobs, he does not look like succeeding. Instead, as he says, he is trapped inside a shop, his sister-in-law's, "like all the rest of them." His hopes for something better are slowly evaporating. He receives no regular wages. What upsets him most is the monotony of the shop: "I'm getting bored here. I hate it. I've been at it too long—since I was nine—and it's driving me mad." He thinks his lack of success "could be because I'm coloured. Most of the boys I know are in shops like this."

When the boys were asked what they would like to do on leaving school, none of the Indian and Pakistani school-leavers wanted to follow in their fathers' footsteps and own or manage a business. Instead, the Asian boys wanted professional jobs and, in roughly the same numbers as Glaswegians, skilled manual jobs (19 and 23 respectively). Thus 18 Asian boys, as against seven Glaswegians, mentioned specific professions they would like to pursue.

They were especially interested in life sciences and engineering, rather than pure science or arts subjects. These ambitions are reflected in their greater readiness to continue their education beyond school. "I'll go on as far as I can until I stop passing exams," one Sikh boy said. "When I start failing things, then I'll get out. I don't want to be a low-class person and when a job stops, not to be able to find another one." At all levels the Asian boys were more interested in academic rather than vocational courses, though always with the long-term view of improving their job chances.

Perhaps most striking is the small number of Asian boys who had found work by the time of

the second interviews. Only 13 of the 54 Asians were working, compared with 32 of the 56 Glaswegians. Of the remainder, all but the six Asians and four Glaswegians who were unemployed continued with full-time education:

	Glaswegians	Asians
working	32	13
university college (degree level)	5	8
further education colleges etc.	5	8
school	2	13
unemployed	4	6
no information	8	6
total No. in sample	56	54

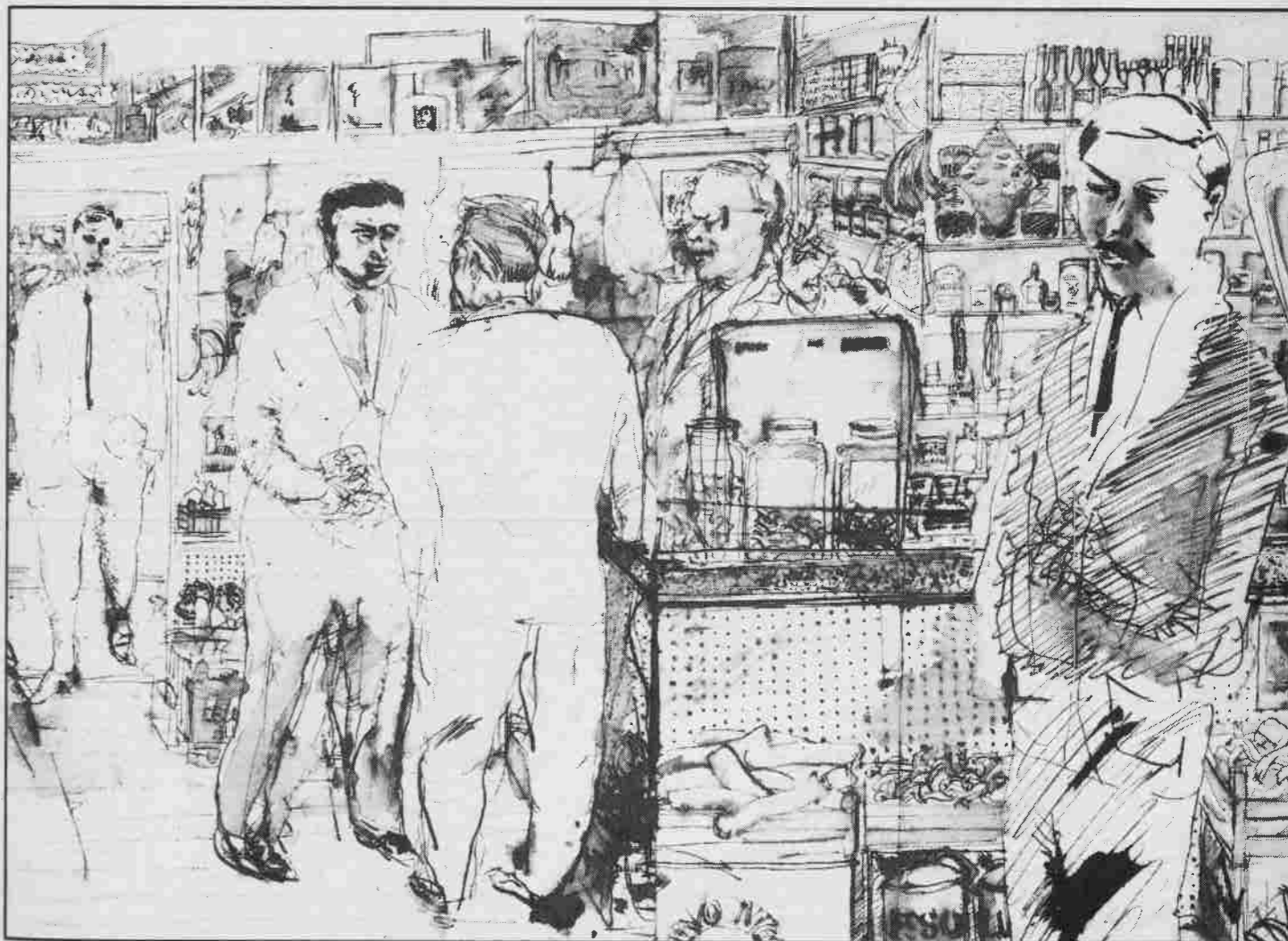
It is often claimed that the inferior jobs immigrant school-leavers get are because of their inadequate mastery of the language. It is therefore important to point out that the Asian school-leavers in our study had not recently arrived in Britain. Only four had been here under five years. The highest number, 25, had been here five to nine years and 15 for ten or more years. The remaining ten were born here. Most of the fathers, if not the mothers, could speak English fluently.

Eight of the Asian boys and five Glaswegians had succeeded in their intention to go to university. Five of the eight Asians (but none of the Glaswegians) at further education college are doing "Highers" (an intermediate exam between O and A levels) with a view to higher education later. Obviously one cannot tell what jobs they will get, but research by Roger Ballard and Bronwen Holden in Leeds, showing "a wide discrepancy between the success

rates of black and white graduates applying for jobs," does not encourage optimism.

A high proportion of the Asian boys who said they were leaving school were, in fact, still there. Some had returned in September, chastened from a summer's fruitless job-hunt. Others unexpectedly told us they had never intended to leave school at that time. Clearly in this case there is an unusual breakdown of teacher-pupil communications not found with the Glaswegians. The teachers may not have grasped the avid desire for educational qualifications held by some Asians who, had they been similarly placed Glaswegians, would have left school. The fact that some Asians, but no Glaswegians, had chosen to continue with Highers at further education college instead of school supports this view.

David Beetham and others have argued that immigrant school-leavers create their own misfortune, either because they have "unrealistic" hopes of jobs or because they search for work ineffectively. For example, it is claimed that native boys do not aim so high, have a wider and more flexible range of job choices, and lack the unmerited optimism of young immigrants. As we have seen, Glaswegian Asian boys often aimed for professional jobs: thus they do aim high. When they hoped for skilled jobs, these were also within the services sector—motor mechanics, electrical engineers and so on—and were rarely in the manufacturing industry. But if some of the claims about immigrant boys are true, this does not mean they are unrealistic in their job choices. A very few may be—we did meet a would-



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be teacher with no 'o' grades, who may never acquire the required skills—but their number is tiny.

Criticisms of "lack of realism" ignore the long-term strategies of educational investment that these boys have planned. They may not be expecting professional jobs without a struggle but they do, reasonably, expect to get, say, a university place, if they achieve the entry requirements. In some cases, too, they may be unaware of the scarcity of jobs in areas such as the services sector. More detailed information about the various apprenticeships available would produce more entrants for these. But ignorance like this is rather different from the blind, "pigheaded" attitudes some writers seem to attribute to "unrealistic" immigrants.

Notice, too, how "realism" is linked with the choices of native school-leavers. We reject this since in Glasgow many of these boys were much too fatalistic about their capacities. We also suspect that one measure of "realism" may be that large numbers of these groups decide to go on fulfilling the manpower requirements for unskilled, low-paid work in firms whose very existence depends on paying workers badly. If this is so, we would stop using the language of "hopes" at all.

The second theory about immigrants' problems is the supposedly inadequate use of job-hunting procedures. Here again we found only a small number of immigrants who had made very little active effort to find the job they wanted.

The Glasgow Asians often found their jobs by having a patron to sponsor them—friends and family who either directly employed them or "spoke" for them. However, this is an obvious procedure for those having to take immigrant community jobs. Moreover, Asian boys were not alone in this respect since native school-leavers also made extensive use of family and friends, particularly when applying for better, more skilled jobs—often found after immediately starting work. Asian boys were much more reliant on the Youth Employment Service for skilled work: indeed, a third of all their jobs were obtained in this way. For Glaswegians the Youth Employment Service was also used for finding a third of the first jobs, but hardly at all afterwards: only two of the 22 subsequent jobs were found this way.

Some methods of getting a job used by native Glaswegians were totally ineffective when tried by Asian boys. For example, Glaswegian boys often got jobs either by answering newspaper advertisements or by asking for work round factories, or shops, on their own initiative. When Asian boys applied similarly, they were totally unsuccessful. True, they tried these methods less assiduously than the native boys, but this is hardly surprising when the effort is so unproductive. The following two cases show some of the typical difficulties qualified Asian school-leavers face when looking for jobs.

Z stayed at school longer than his teachers expected. When he left, at 20, he had perfect English, five o grades and two Highers. He is self-confident and urbane, rather critical of other young Asians. By the time he left school he had decided he was "not clever enough for architecture or the Guards," his earlier ambitions, and would apply eventually for a telephone engineering training. Meanwhile he applied for clerical jobs. Surprisingly, he did not get them. His application on each occasion simply disappeared on phoning, he would be told the job had now been taken. Alfred Marks' bureau for office jobs could not help him at all. Eventually, by scanning the newspapers each day, he found a milkman's round which he accepted straight away. This job

turned out to be a personal disaster because, at the end of one week, someone collected and stole all his milk money. Despite police intervention on his behalf, he was forced to compensate the dairy himself from his wages. When last spoken to (since our original interviews), he was driving a lorry for a firm of ironmongers.

J was born and brought up in Scotland. Despite his six o grades, he had been unemployed for a year when interviewed last. His brothers run a family business; a clothes stall circulating between the Barrows and, in the summer, the county shows. J could work for them permanently but is reluctant to do so. His earlier plan has been to do electronic engineering in the services, but his parents' ill-health made it necessary to look for jobs in Glasgow only. Every avenue tried since leaving school has proved fruitless: answering advertisements, writing letters "on spec" round hospitals for lab technician's work, an interview for a clerical job with the civil service.

He is becoming very dispirited and bitter about the difficulties encountered. Since a Pakistani with Highers got the civil service job, he regards his own qualifications as at fault, dismissing discrimination as a factor in this or any other of his refusals. Yet he has quite an adequate educational level for the jobs he wants and should be highly eligible for them. Such cases lead us to conclude that poor job-hunting is rarely the reason for the Asian boys' disappointments.

The Asian school-leavers we interviewed were a minority within the school. They mixed socially with their fellow pupils, at least during school hours. However, their younger brothers coming into the primary schools formed a much higher proportion of the school intake in certain inner-city areas and almost the full roll-call in some classes. They are, therefore, under less pressure to speak English. In spite of the fact that more will have been born in this country, the language problems may be more severe.

Asian school-leavers have special problems and those who educate and advise them need to be sensitive to these. To promote such awareness, youth employment officers should monitor the educational and employment record of Asian school-leavers and publish the results. Discrimination is notoriously difficult to prove. It is not, however, just the result of an employer deciding that he will never take on someone of a particular race (or religion) however good he is. Discrimination also occurs on a statistical, cumulative basis, when a number of employers each decide to hire a local boy because he is local, in a situation where an equally qualified Asian boy applies as well. In a "slack" labour market, this second kind of discrimination is probably very common and leads to exactly the same feelings of rejection by the immigrant boys concerned as the first type.

Although we have concentrated on comparing the Asian boys' jobs detrimentally with those of the Glaswegians, existing class discrimination against local working-class boys should not be ignored as this is equally disabling. The problem for Asian boys seeking work are partly those facing all school-leavers where there is high unemployment. Recession can only make the situation worse, though the effects may be less in an area like Clydeside, which has suffered generations of economic depression. The only long-term solution to this problem is to stimulate general economic growth before eradicating the unemployment and grossly inferior jobs which aid discrimination.

The 'nationalisation' of local politics

Mark Schofield

One result of the 1972 reorganisation has been greater Labour and Tory activity. But was the Independents' farewell inevitable once local expenditure swelled?

The results of the English and Welsh county council elections, which take place next Thursday, should cause few surprises. Conservatives (regardless of local circumstances) will make substantial gains at the expense of both Labour and Liberals. All councillors now accept, with dismay, that local election results bear little relation to what happens at county hall. They reflect public opinion about central government. But Thursday's results, whether in Devon, Northumberland or London, should not be interpreted as a specific reaction to the Prime Minister's pact with the Liberals or to the government's pay policies. It is simply that any government party will normally lose electoral support at by-elections and local elections during most of its period of office (less so at the beginning).

Another less obvious outcome, which can be safely predicted for Thursday, is a continuation of the "nationalisation" of party politics. That is, the increasing propensity of the national parties to intervene in local elections—fighting an authority-wide campaign, based on a policy programme.

National partisanship in local government is not a new phenomenon. Before 1920 it was widespread. But the rise of the Labour Party, and the decline of the Liberals, threatened the quiescence of middle class party politics and saw the emergence of the "anti-socialist Independent" group. This was a pragmatic alliance of councillors who were often active Conservatives (or Liberals) in national politics and shared a hostility to socialism.

The extent of the Independents' organisation and coordination in councils since has varied greatly. So has their cooperation with Conservatives—though there has generally been a good deal of ideological similarity between the two. There has seldom been strict party discipline either within Independent or in Conservative/Independent groups, but one Conservative councillor commented recently that "we always come out of our meetings well united as to the stands we take."

Party politics have been especially prevalent in urban areas and in large authorities. R. A. W. Rhodes calculated the average level of partisanship in English and Welsh local authorities for the years 1964-70. (Scotland is a separate phenomenon: and next week, anyway, the county-equivalents—namely, regions—are not polling, but only districts.) He classifies as "party authorities" those where the three major national parties together constitute more than 50 per cent of council membership. He found that of rural districts (small rural authorities) only 11 per cent were party authorities. For counties (large rural authorities), the figure was 30 per cent. In urban districts (small and urban), party systems had developed in 58 per cent of cases. But in county boroughs (large and urban), it was 91 per cent.

Local government reorganisation has brought a dramatic increase in partisanship. The percentage of all types of local council classified as "party

authorities" in 1964, 1967 and 1970 was 44 per cent, 43 per cent and 46 per cent respectively. After reorganisation in 1973, the figure was nearly 64 per cent. Independents and others would have formed the largest group on ten of the new English counties in 1970 (if they had existed then with their present boundaries). In 1973, after the first new-style elections, they were the largest group on only three; were in a minority in every county except Cornwall and the Isle of Wight; and saw their average share of seats reduced to 14 per cent.

Wales, on the other hand, was less affected by reorganisation. The industrial south east of Wales remained highly partisan. But rural Wales, with its distinct political culture, continued to be dominated by Independent politics, even after 1973.

Why has reorganisation been the occasion for such an increase in national party intervention in English local politics? We must consider this in the context of the changing role of the British state. The 20th century has seen the demise of the laissez-faire variant of the capitalist mode of production. It has been replaced by a managerial "planned" capitalism; oligopolistic and public sectors coexist with a residual competitive sector.

This has meant the state not merely maintaining the material sub-structural conditions of production (roads, water supply and suchlike), but also playing a promotional role in the economy, and investing to fill functional gaps in the market. The postwar period in Britain has also seen the development of the welfare state, providing material benefits and services. The result has been a twin-pronged growth of state expenditure, comprising what marxists refer to as "social capital" and "social expenses."

For local government, the welfare state has meant a rapid growth in the scope and complexity of local administration. This, in turn, has increasingly raised national political issues at the local level.

Opponents of partisanship in local government have persistently argued that "there is no Conservative or socialist way of laying a road." But local decisions now touch more and more often on such controversial issues as whether or how to introduce comprehensive education. There may still not be a Conservative or a socialist way of laying a road; but decisions may have to be taken whether to spend money on roads or on social services. It is the raising of these sorts of issues that has encouraged the Labour Party, in particular, to take local elections more seriously after its patchy history of "gas and water" municipal socialism, most notably Herbert Morrison's London County Council regime. When the scale of local government units was radically increased in 1972, it gave the Labour Party the opportunity of controlling whole conurbations, not just inner cities.

The growing propensity of the state to play a positive role in the regulation of the economy has

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Nicholas Bosanquet, and P. B. Doeringer, "Is there a dual labour market in Great Britain?" (*The Economic Journal*, vol 83, No. 330, 1973)

Roger Ballard and Bronwen Holden, "Racial discrimination: no room at the top" (*NEW SOCIETY*, 17 April 1975)

David Beetham, *Immigrant School leavers and the Youth Employment Service in Birmingham* (Institute of Race Relations, Special Series, 1967)